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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, INR, DRL, DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA;
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SUBJECT: CHAD: INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS DISCUSS ELECTIONS

REF: NDJAMENA 252

Classified By: P/E Officer Haywood Rankin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The French Ambassador in Chad gave vent to a gloomy view of the Chadian political scene to the EU and U.S. Ambassadors and UN resrep February 24. Meeting the day before the announcement that presidential elections will take place May 3, he acknowledged that Deby was unacceptable (corrupt, ineffective, ill), but insisted that Deby was the least bad alternative because the opposition would never agree on a single strong candidate. No capable candidate existed, and even if it did the opposition was too ethnically divided and weak and selfish to agree on one, he claimed. He said that France, as the only foreign power with troops on the ground, would be blamed as in Rwanda if things fell apart, so France was in no mood for experimentation. This desperate view, so baldly stated, appears to rule out French support for an arrangement by which Deby would commit to relinquishing power and which would provide time for fixing electoral problems and getting the opposition on track. But the French are worried enough to be talking (at length), and we should urge them in a more positive direction. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) EU Ambassador Robert Kremer (Luxembourg) convoked French Ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot, Ambassador Wall, and UN resident representative Kingsley Amaning February 24 to discuss funding for two recent human-rights-related proposals: (1) one from the Minister of Human rights for a conference to discuss Chad's human-rights issues, and (2) an initiative spearheaded by human-rights activist Delphine Kamneloum to create a mechanism for political dialogue and ending Deby's rule. The group agreed that the former was too vague to merit the considerable funding the Minister had requested. The latter proved to be the launch pad for Bercot to vent his views on Chad's political dilemma, with much passion and at some length.

French Ambassador Holds Forth

¶3. (SBU) Bercot described Delphine's initiative as dangerous. She had come to Paris just as Deby arrived there on a private visit and she had been extremely active there in

pedaling her initiative to oust Deby, which she claimed had the backing of an organized and credible opposition. Various NGO's were being swayed by Delphine, but the French Government was completely against her initiative. Deby's term ended August 8 by which time the Chadian constitution required an election. Delphine was effectively urging suspension of the constitution and transition by means of a vacuum of power rather than by election.

¶4. (SBU) Contrary to what Delphine claimed and what many observers of Chad seemed to delude themselves into believing, Bercot said, there was, in effect, no political opposition with any substance in Chad. At the time of Deby's accession there were five parties, now there were 83, but only one politician, Ngarlejy Yorongar, had any significant following and he was a loose cannon that could not build any further following. Most of the country was totally turned off and uninterested in politics and elections. The shriveled-up political class existed mostly in Ndjamenya, and these mere 100 could not begin to agree among themselves.

¶5. (SBU) The European troika in Ndjamenya (EU, France, Germany) had recently for the first time received a delegation of the opposition coalition CPDC (Coalition of Parties for the Defense of the Constitution), Bercot noted, but Yorongar was not officially in that coalition, which included a few grand old men with a modest following and others with no more backing than their own village. Seven CPDC members who ran in the previous presidential election had some national stature, but it was clear in the meeting with the troika that they were nowhere near agreeing on a single opposition leader. In Bercot's view, they never would do so. They were incapable of it. A Sara would never agree to an Arab and vice versa, and each would always see himself as the only candidate.

¶6. (SBU) Bercot said that France had to deal with reality. It could not afford to be adventurous and toy with vague ideas about replacing Deby. France was the only power with troops on the ground and, in the advent of violence and chaos, the world would look to France to save the foreigners and salvage what was possible of the country. France would be blamed for everything, as was the case with Rwanda. Darfur was a "clinic" for what could transpire across Chad. Then, one would be talking about 80,000 troops and a new Liberia. Deby was ill, the Deby regime was "dead," and Deby was totally unacceptable, but Deby was nonetheless the least bad solution for Chad for the moment and at this stage. France was seized with the specter of ethnic bloodletting. Thus it seemed to many that France was "behind" Deby. In fact, even if Deby were abandoned by all the world, he would still be the only one capable of holding the country together, if it could be held together.

¶7. (SBU) Bercot agreed that an effort could and should be made to promote dialogue between the government and the opposition, even such as it was. Thus had the troika received the CPDC. It would continue to do so, guardedly. The CPDC had shown itself thus far to be negative, insisting on continuing an election boycott until a new electoral list was produced and until the electoral commission was revamped.

(Note: These are the same conditions advocated by the UNDP.) Such things required time. The electoral commission was legally constituted and had existed for some years without opposition participation. The CPDC needed to be pushed in a more positive direction, not encouraged to increase the gap between itself and the government, according to Bercot.

UNDP and U.S. Views

¶8. (SBU) UNDP resrep Amaning said that the corrections demanded by the CPDC were achievable given enough time, but all sides had to commit themselves to dialogue. Amaning was more concerned about commitment from the government side, and he would not proceed in encouraging a dialogue until he had

personally seen Deby and assured himself of Deby's own commitment. Bercot harrumphed that it was not necessary to have Deby's authorization. Amaning said that it was essential to be sure that both sides understood the gravity of the situation and were serious about a dialogue.

¶9. (SBU) Ambassador Wall said that an election under present conditions, without dialogue, would be worthless. Delphine's project, as stated, was too ambitious, but she was not the only figure in the opposition seeking a national dialogue. Kremer's deputy, Martin Klaucke, observed that the essence of Delphine's proposal was a call for dialogue, certainly not for violence. Ambassador Wall said that it was essential to get on with this dialogue right away, but there could be no serious dialogue if Deby sought only to remain in power. The longer the current impasse continued, he argued, the worst would be the consequences when Deby finally did fall. It was clear that the opposition, such as it was, would not accept a prolongation of Deby's rule.

¶10. (SBU) This observation brought about another outpouring from Bercot on the subject of the opposition's ineffectiveness. Deby, he insisted, was the "sole common denominator." Bercot commented that Deby had recently told Bercot that he would not need to manipulate the next election to win. Deby had told him that there was no one in the opposition that his opponents would ever agree on and no one that the populace itself would agree on to replace him.

¶11. (SBU) However, Bercot concluded, France would support an effort at national dialogue: bring together key ministers with the CPDC and eventually Yorongar; this group of diplomats would be present as observers and let them fight it out for 24 hours if necessary and see if they got anywhere. Amaning confirmed that UNDP would moderate the meeting, which he would set up after he met Deby. Amaning confirmed that he would get to work on this dialogue as soon as he had met Deby.

New Elections Scheduled

¶12. (SBU) On February 25, the government announced the presidential election would be held May 3. The ruling Movement for Patriotic Salvation (MPS) will hold its congress beginning March 3. General Secretary Mahamat Hisseine, a Zaghawa, is expected to be replaced. We have heard rumors of his sacking since the MPS failed to "get out the vote" for the June 2005 referendum. Bercot said that Hisseine would likely be replaced by a non-Zaghawa, perhaps a Gorane. The newest Mrs. Deby -- Fatime Hinde -- now special advisor to Deby, is organizing the search effort.

¶13. (C) Comment: The two project proposals provided an opportunity for the key Western diplomatic missions to discuss the upcoming elections. Bercot's emotional presentation indicates France's frustration with Deby. However, the French do not yet appear ready to pressure Deby into the modalities for a free, fair election. Leading opposition figures tell us that they have a candidate in mind, but will not announce unless they decide to participate in the election, i.e., their conditions are met.

¶14. (SBU) Health Note: During his monologues, the French Ambassador made several references to Deby's health and recent private visit to Paris. At one point, he stated that even if Deby were reelected, he might not live until the legislative elections, which presumably would take place next year.

WALL